

data hacking: plurals

Semantics 3, UCLA Linguistics

Spring 2022

1 today's goals

- what are plurals, empirically?
- what are their morphosyntactic properties?
- what are their semantic properties?
 - variable interpretation, quantificational force
 - collective vs. distributive considerations
- how do we think they should be treated, semantically?

2 the core data

- types of plurals:
 - bare plurals, e.g. *Emus were crossing the street*
 - plural definites, e.g. *The emus were crossing the street*
 - plural indefinites, e.g. *Sm emus were crossing the street*
- what's their syntactic distribution?
- what's their semantic distribution (i.e. wrt determiners, etc)?
- how do they relate to mass nouns?
 - (1)
 - a. The water gathered in big pools.
 - b. The children gathered around their teacher.
 - (2)
 - a. If the liquid in this puddle is water and the liquid in that puddle is water, then the liquid in both puddles is water.
 - b. If the animals in this camp are horses and the animals in that camp are horses, then the animals in both camps are horses.
- how do they relate to universal and existential quantifiers? ('variable interpretation')
 - (how do they relate to free relatives?)
- let's talk about collectivity/cumulativity and distributivity
 - (3)
 - a. A and B carried a piano up the stairs.
 - b. The boxes are heavy.

- is this difference lexicalized? (in the DP or VP?)
- is it an ambiguity?¹
- what might we expect about the interaction between mass nouns and distributive nouns?
- (what does that tell us about plural count nouns?)
- some predicates aren't cumulative or distributive per se, but they do impose number requirements on their arguments
 - (4) a. B and C are a couple.
 - b. The students triangulated their positions.
- some constructions aren't cumulative or distributive but can be disambiguated after the fact
 - (5) a. Three students wrote an article.
 - b. They sent it to *L&P*.
- other data from other languages?

3 notes, empirical generalizations

¹What's the difference between ambiguity, underspecification, and polysemy?